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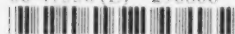
Report of the Economic and Social Council

2006 United Nations Population Award

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly the report of the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund on the United Nations Population Award, established by the Assembly in its resolution 36/201. The report covers 2006 and was prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 1982/112.

* A.61/150.



Report of the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund on the 2006 United Nations Population Award

I. Introduction

1. On 17 December 1981, the General Assembly adopted resolution 36/201, entitled "Establishment of the United Nations Population Award". The Award is presented annually to an individual or individuals, to an institution or institutions or to any combination thereof for the most outstanding contribution to increasing awareness of population questions or to finding solutions to them.

2. The laureate is selected by the Committee for the United Nations Population Award, which is composed of representatives of 10 Member States of the United Nations elected by the Economic and Social Council for a period of three years.

3. On 5 December 1986, by its decision 41/445, the General Assembly amended article 2, paragraph 1, of the regulations governing the Award (resolution 36/201, annex), so that an individual and an institution could share the Award.

4. On 26 May 1987, by its decision 1987/129, the Economic and Social Council amended the rules of procedure of the Committee for the United Nations Population Award accordingly.

5. During its 1st regular meeting, on 7 March 2006, the Committee for the United Nations Population Award re-elected Judith Mbula Bahemuka of Kenya as Chairperson.

6. At its 9th, 10th and 11th plenary meetings, on 10 and 12 May 2006, the Economic and Social Council elected the following five Member States for a three-year term on the Committee, beginning on 1 January 2007: Bangladesh, Haiti, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Peru and Sweden.

7. The Council postponed the election of three members from the Group of African States, one member from the Group of Asian States and one member from the Group of Eastern European States for a three-year term beginning on 1 January 2007.

II. 2006 United Nations Population Award

8. A total of 26 nominations were received for the 2006 United Nations Population Award from qualified nominators. Of these, 17 were for the individual category and nine for the institutional category. On 12 April 2006, within the mandate given to it by the General Assembly, and after a thorough review of the nominations, the Committee selected Dr. Halida Hanum Akhter (Bangladesh) in the individual category and the Fondation pour la santé reproductive et l'éducation familiale in the institutional category.

9. Dr. Halida Hanum Akhter, Director-General, Family Planning Association of Bangladesh, was selected for her significant involvement in epidemiological and clinical research in such areas as contraceptive effectiveness, reproductive health-care needs and services, studies of social and medical aspects of male

contraceptives, identification of factors associated with contraceptive failure, determinants and consequences of abortion in Bangladesh and assessments of maternal mortality in Bangladesh. As recognition for her scientific work in family planning and health service delivery, in 1995 Dr. Akhter received the Justus Liebig Award from the University of Giessen, Germany. In the course of her professional career, Dr. Akhter has been instrumental in promoting a better understanding of the risks and benefits of countless family-planning methods and technologies. She has also provided solid scientific knowledge for the incorporation of family planning methods and technologies into health systems at the community and national levels. A self-sufficient health model for young women was developed under her direction at Health Promotion Limited; this model was an effective strategy to confront maternal and child mortality at the community level.

10. The Fondation pour la santé reproductive et l'éducation familiale (FOSREF) was selected for its outstanding achievements in the field of reproductive health and the promotion of family life in Haiti. It was created in 1988 by Dr. Adeline Jocelyn Verly, a devoted physician specialized in public health issues. FOSREF began its operations with the creation of the Centre for Gynaecological Prevention and Family Education. Through a network of 26 local centres, FOSREF provides varied reproductive health services that cover more than 1.2 million persons and incorporate family-planning services and activities for the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. Through its long experience, FOSREF has identified various population targets for its activities: men and women of reproductive age, adolescents and young people, and particularly abandoned children and sex workers. Educational services are provided to community leaders, schoolteachers and the young population in general. Programmes for young people give emphasis to reproductive health and reproductive rights and are aimed at fostering sexual responsibility. FOSREF also offers a variety of other educational activities that include semi-professional training in art, cuisine, fashion, handicrafts and similar crafts.

III. Financial matters

11. As at 31 December 2005, the Trust Fund had a total fund balance of \$739,231. Interest income in 2005 was \$19,520. Expenditures in 2005, including the prizes, totalled \$49,007. The interest income, as in previous years, fell below expenditure levels.



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Human resources management

Activities of the Ethics Office

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The General Assembly, in its resolution 60/254 of 8 May 2006 on the "Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations", having welcomed the establishment of the Ethics Office and endorsed its main responsibilities, requested the Secretary-General to submit, in the context of his annual report, information on the activities of the Ethics Office and on the implementation of ethics policies, under the agenda item relating to human resources management.

The present report covers the operations of the Ethics Office from 1 January to 31 July 2006.

* A/61/150.



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I. Introduction

1. The first report on the activities of the Ethics Office is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/254, paragraphs 16 (f) and (i), in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of ethics policies, under the agenda item relating to human resources management. The Secretary-General will present a comprehensive review during the sixty-second session, as requested in paragraph 16 (g) of that resolution. In addition, the present report addresses the request for the expeditious filling of vacancies for the Office, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/283, section I, paragraph 1. It also responds to the request for a report on the implementation of regulations governing the status, basic rights and duties of officials other than Secretariat officials and experts on mission, as stated in resolution 60/238, section III, paragraph 2.

II. Background

2. The Secretary-General established the independent Ethics Office in the United Nations Secretariat upon the approval of its creation by the General Assembly at the 2005 World Summit (resolution 60/1, para. 161 (d)). It was created in the context of the overall Secretariat and management reform initiatives, which are to be anchored in a culture of ethics, transparency and accountability.

3. The objective of the Office, as set forth in Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/2005/22, is to assist the Secretary-General in ensuring that all staff members observe and perform their functions consistent with the highest standards of integrity, as envisaged in the Charter of the United Nations. The Office reports directly to the Secretary-General and does not replace any existing mechanism available to staff for the reporting of misconduct or the resolution of grievances.

4. The main areas of responsibility of the Ethics Office are as follows:

(a) Developing standards, training and education on ethics issues, in coordination with the Office of Human Resources Management and other offices as appropriate, including ensuring annual ethics training for all staff;

(b) Providing confidential advice and guidance to staff on ethical issues (such as conflicts of interest), including administering an ethics helpline;

(c) Administering the Organization's financial disclosure programme;

(d) Undertaking the responsibilities assigned to it under the Organization's policy for the protection of staff against retaliation for reporting misconduct and for cooperating with duly authorized audits or investigations;

(e) Such other functions as the Secretary-General considers appropriate for the Office.

5. In assisting the Secretary-General, the Ethics Office functions as a guardian of the standards of conduct for United Nations staff. In that capacity, the Office is proactive in updating those standards and in providing information and developing content for training on them. In addition, the Office is consulted on the ethical implications of key policies, such as procurement and post-employment restrictions.

6. The Office provides a secure confidential environment in which staff can feel free to consult on ethical issues and seek protection against retaliation for the reporting of misconduct in good faith. To that end, the Ethics Office has set up an ethics helpline (1 917 367 9858) and a dedicated e-mail address (ethicsoffice@un.org). Information on the Office is also available to staff through the United Nations Intranet (iSeek). To protect the confidentiality of sensitive information, the Office has adopted stringent procedures for managing information and developed a secure data filing and tracking system.

7. Since its inception, the Ethics Office has been establishing operations under the guidance of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General. The present report will provide an overview of the setting-up activities and operations of the Office, as well as an initial assessment of its functioning.

III. Establishment of the Ethics Office

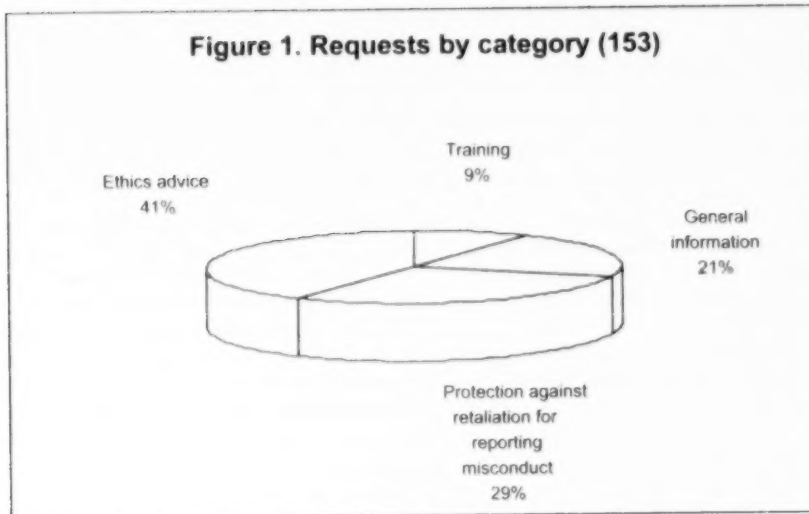
8. The Ethics Office opened on 3 January 2006 with two seconded staff. In February, the Secretary-General appointed an international integrity and anti-corruption expert as Special Adviser on the Establishment of the Ethics Office, to provide guidance and strategic direction to the Office. By March, the Office had in place a director and four staff on an interim basis, as well as a consultant.

9. During the following months, the recruitment procedures for filling permanent posts were put in place, including announcements in international publications with wide circulation such as the *Asian Wall Street Journal*, *The Economist*, *Jeune Afrique*, *le Monde* and the *Wall Street Journal*. All efforts are being made to complete the recruitment process as expeditiously as possible.

10. The Office has been establishing administrative and operational procedures while implementing the policy areas under its mandate. The Office has consulted with relevant internal offices, such as the Office of Human Resources Management, the Office of Legal Affairs, the secretariat of the Joint Appeals Board, the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and the Office of Internal Oversight Services, as well as external public and private sector organizations. While consultations and deliberations absorbed much staff time, they have ensured that the Office had access to the best information and profited from lessons learned by others.

11. During its first months of operation, the Office had to conduct its setting-up activities while responding to staff requests for services, which totalled 153 by the end of July. The Office also coordinated the expanded annual financial disclosure exercise, covering more than 1,800 staff, which generated hundreds of inquiries about filing instructions.

12. As shown in figure 1, requests for services fell into the following categories: ethics advice (41%), protection against retaliation for reporting misconduct (29%), general information (21%) and training (9%). The time required to respond to each request varied considerably, from a few minutes to several weeks.

Figure 1. Requests by category (153)

13. Figure 2 illustrates the source of the requests for services: New York (64%), regional commissions (13%), Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi offices (12%), peacekeeping missions (6%), other United Nations agencies (4%), and Member States (1%). A total of 35 per cent of requests came from duty stations outside New York.

Figure 2. Requests by source (153)

IV. Operations and activities

A. Standards and training

14. One of the most important functions of the Ethics Office is its leading role in developing and setting standards of conduct and facilitating annual training on ethics issues, in collaboration with the Office of Human Resources Management.

15. To provide staff with a user-friendly guide to existing standards — or the United Nations code of conduct, as stipulated in the Secretary-General's bulletin entitled "Status, Basic Rights and Duties of United Nations Staff Members" (see ST/SGB/2002/13). The Office is working with the Office of Human Resources Management and the Office of Legal Affairs. The guide highlights the main challenges to professional and ethical conduct and clarifies the reasons behind the standards, in the context of the mission and values of the Organization. It also provides references to key documents, services and other resources to help staff put the values and principles of the Organization into practice. Due to be published late in 2006, the guide and its broad dissemination will advance efforts to develop a system-wide understanding of the United Nations code of conduct.

16. Work is also ongoing with existing and new training programmes to strengthen and raise awareness of ethics and accountability. In 2005, the Office of Human Resources Management launched an integrity awareness learning programme, available online in English and French. The certification programme is designed to promote awareness of United Nations core values, and covers four specific areas of personal and professional integrity. The programme had been completed by almost 6,500 staff members at the end of the current reporting period.

17. In 2005, a half-day workshop entitled "Working together: professional ethics and integrity in our daily work" was held on a mandatory basis for all staff in the Department of Management. During the pilot phase, its substantive content was refined and adapted by the Ethics Office and the Office of Human Resources Management. Almost 900 staff members of the Department of Management participated in the workshop, and a number of special sessions have been organized for personnel of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

18. An expanded and adapted workshop will be launched Secretariat-wide in the third quarter of 2006, following a special programme on "Ethics in the workplace" for senior officials at the Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General levels. In addition, leadership and management development programmes now include ethics training components, as do courses in other areas such as procurement and contract management, performance management and competency-based selection and interviewing skills. Collaborative efforts between the Ethics Office and the Office of Human Resources Management will continue to refine and tailor ethics training initiatives and expand their scope and range in line with evolving needs.

19. Staff members of the Ethics Office also regularly attend and deliver briefings at learning programmes or, upon request, for special target groups (for example, staff members with financial disclosure obligations or new staff orientations).

B. Change management and communication

20. The standard-setting and training activities of the Office must be based on a clear vision of the desired changes in the professional behaviour of the staff, leading to the desired shift in the culture of the Organization. A change management strategy is essential to communicating and attaining that vision. To facilitate the change process, the Ethics Office intends to provide staff with a clear understanding of its role and encourage them to avail themselves of the services and resources at their disposal.

21. To that end, the Ethics Office is working with the Monitoring, Evaluation and Consulting Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services to devise a change management plan aimed at raising staff awareness of and ensuring compliance with United Nations standards of conduct and values. The implementation of the change management plan, with a major communication strategy, will include assisting staff members to identify ethical dilemmas and encouraging them to seek the services of the Office.

22. In that connection, the Special Adviser has been active in emphasizing the importance of outreach to staff and senior officials. Accordingly, he has visited a number of duty stations, including the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and United Nations Office at Nairobi. Visits to other duty stations are planned.

23. Moreover, the Ethics Office has been featured in United Nations media reports and on iSeek. At the invitation of the Spokesman of the Secretary-General, the Special Adviser and other staff members gave a briefing to the United Nations press corps. The Special Adviser has also undertaken speaking engagements at international events, such as the World Ethics Forum, to publicize the work of the Office.

24. Proposals for a dedicated "ethics day" to highlight the importance of ethical practices in the United Nations workplace are under consideration for late in 2006.

C. Advice and guidance

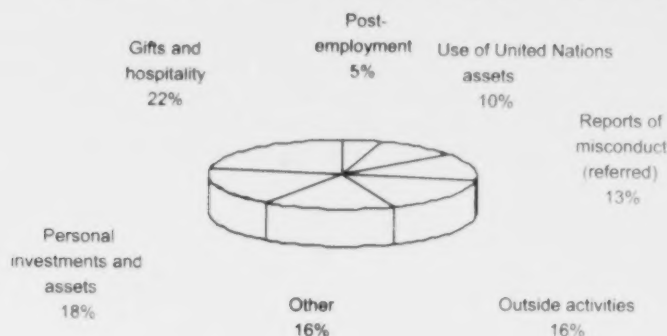
25. The Ethics Office plays an important role in providing confidential advice and guidance to both individuals and groups. In addition, the Office has been consulted on the ethical aspects of proposed policy changes, as mentioned above.

26. Staff members may contact the Office to discuss potential conflicts of interest and obtain clarification of relevant regulations and rules, with a view to avoiding any misinformed or misguided action. Based on the facts presented by the enquiring staff member, the Office advises on the various courses of action a staff member may take in his or her personal or professional life in order not to compromise his or her official duties.

27. The Office does not replace existing mechanisms for reporting restricted activities (such as accepting gifts or participating in outside activities), or for granting authorization for them. Rather, it serves as an office from which to seek advice prior to requesting authorization for a restricted activity in order to avoid or manage a conflict of interest or the appearance of one.

28. As at the end of July, the Office had received 62 requests for advice on conflicts of interest and other ethics-related questions. Figure 3 presents a breakdown by category: personal investments and assets (18%), gifts and hospitality (22%), outside activities (16%), reports of misconduct referred to appropriate offices (13%), use of assets of the Organization (10%), post-employment activities (5%) and other questions (16%).

Figure 3. Ethics advice by category (62 requests)



29. In providing ethics advice, the Office has noted the particular complexity of staff rules regarding the receiving and reporting of gifts, benefits, honours and favours (hereafter referred to as gifts). Staff rules generally prohibit the receipt of gifts by staff in their official capacity, except in the very restricted circumstances outlined in the rules. Furthermore, a distinction must be made between gifts to staff as individuals and gifts to the Organization (for example, authorized travel for staff members that has been accepted by the Organization on their behalf).

30. Although the Office has consulted widely about practices — with the Office of Human Resources Management, the Office of Legal Affairs and ethics offices in other jurisdictions — in providing advice in this area, it is clear that a concerted effort to streamline and standardize procedures at all duty stations is necessary. The Office is consulting with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to explore the possibility of adapting its pilot gift registry programme.

D. Financial disclosure programme

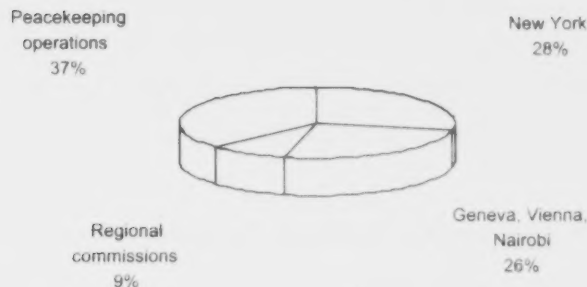
31. The financial disclosure programme is another important component of the Secretary-General's mission to maintain and enhance public trust in the integrity of the United Nations. The primary purpose of requesting staff members to submit financial disclosure statements is to identify and propose ways to resolve conflicts of interest arising from their financial holdings and outside activities. This may result in advising staff members to divest themselves of holdings, or to recuse themselves from a particular activity or aspect of their official functions.

32. The financial disclosure programme came into effect on 1 January 1999 pursuant to the adoption of General Assembly resolution 52/252, under which staff members at the Assistant Secretary-General level and above are required to file financial disclosure statements. The programme was revised in 2005 by amendments to staff regulation 1.2 (n) (see A/60/365) and staff rule 101.2 (see ST/SGB/2006/6), by which the scope of the financial disclosure programme was extended and the gift reporting threshold was lowered.

33. The Secretary-General's bulletin on financial disclosure and declaration of interest statements (ST/SGB/2006/6), which came into force on 1 May 2006, outlined the role of the Ethics Office in administering financial disclosure statements and broadened reporting requirements in respect of staff members' spouses and dependent children. It also broadened the scope of the policy to include all staff members at the D-1 and L-6 level and above as well as those with access to confidential procurement or investment information. All staff serving in the Ethics Office are required to file financial disclosure statements.

34. In 2005, more than 1,800 staff members were required to file a financial disclosure or declaration of interest statement. Figure 4 illustrates the geographical spread of the staff members with financial disclosure obligations: peacekeeping operations (37%), New York (28%), Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi offices (26%) and regional commissions (9%). It is noteworthy that more than 70 per cent of those required to file statements were located in duty stations outside New York.

Figure 4. Staff required to file by location (1,800)



35. By the end of July, over 90 per cent of all staff members required to file statements, excluding those in peacekeeping missions, had complied with their obligation under the programme.¹ The Ethics Office continues to follow up with staff members who have not yet submitted their statements.

36. In due course, the statements submitted will be reviewed for completeness of information and analysed according to the objectives of the financial disclosure

¹ The figure includes 140 staff members of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees who were informed of their obligations only in July, owing to extensive internal consultations on the implementation of staff regulation 1.2 (n) within the agency.

programme. In addition, random audits of information provided by staff members holding positions in the Organization exposed to integrity risks will be carried out. All reviews will be conducted by external financial experts in order to safeguard the confidentiality of the information.

37. The procedures adopted for the administration of the financial disclosure programme are based on best practices in other jurisdictions. The external financial experts appointed will be required to follow the same best practices and ensure secure and confidential handling of data submitted by staff members.

38. The financial experts are being selected through an international public tender. The deadline for the submission of proposals was 28 July 2006. Upon completion of the technical and financial evaluations and contractual negotiations, the experts are expected to commence their work in the last quarter of 2006.

39. The financial disclosure requirement is currently limited to the staff members specified in paragraph 33 above. However, Member States have asked whether financial disclosure statements should be required of officials other than Secretariat officials and experts on mission with a fiduciary role.² Currently, the Secretary-General has the authority to introduce that requirement on the basis of regulation 2 (i) of the Regulations Governing the Status, Basic Rights and Duties of Officials other than Secretariat Officials, and Experts on Mission (see ST/SGB/2002/9). He can determine the procedures applicable and, in consultation with the relevant appointing authority, judge whether their functions and interface give rise to potential conflicts of interest.

40. It is recommended that a thorough review of the functions of the officials and experts and of the risks of financial and political interests be carried out by the Ethics Office. Such a review could be undertaken once the permanent staff members of the Office have been recruited. Given the policy-setting or oversight roles and the independence of the bodies involved, careful consideration needs to be given to the appropriate and necessary level of financial disclosure required of their members.

41. The challenge for the financial disclosure programme will be to raise the awareness of staff members to ensure that conflicts of interest are managed or avoided at the outset, without any subsequent need for intervention by the reviewing experts.

E. Protection of staff against retaliation for reporting misconduct

42. A policy on the protection against retaliation for reporting misconduct and for cooperating with duly authorized audits or investigations came into force on 1 January 2006 (see ST/SGB/2005/21). The policy envisages protective measures for staff members under threat of or experiencing retaliation for duly reporting misconduct in their working environment to the responsible offices or officials. It

² They include the Chairman and members of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) and inspectors of the Joint Inspection Unit, members of the Board of Auditors and ICSC commissioners. Member States may also seek to require compliance with the financial disclosure requirements by members of the newly established Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

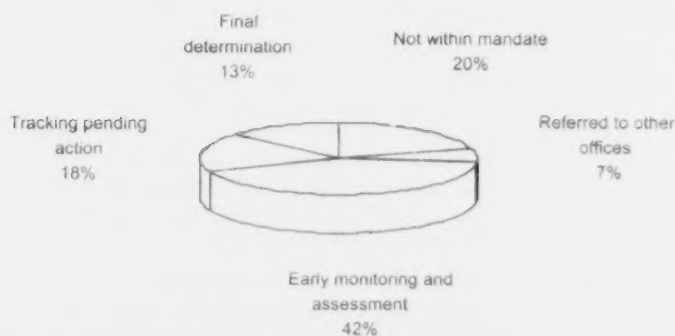
represents a shift of the burden of proof to the Organization, requiring it to show in each case that the alleged retaliatory action is unrelated to the report of misconduct.

43. The Ethics Office ensures confidential and prompt attention to requests for protection against retaliation for having reported misconduct. The Office consults with the individuals concerned to assess whether their requests fall within the protection mandate of the Office. Where warranted, the Office conducts a preliminary review to assess whether there is a credible case of retaliation.

44. If the Office has determined that a credible case of retaliation exists, it refers the matter to the Office of Internal Oversight Services or, where appropriate, to an independent panel. The investigation should be completed within 120 days. Once the investigation has been completed, and if retaliation has been established, the Ethics Office can make recommendations to the head of department or office to correct any negative consequence of retaliation. In the event that the Office is not satisfied with the response from the head of department or office concerned, it can make a recommendation to the Secretary-General for further action.

45. As at 31 July, the Office had received 45 complaints of retaliation for reporting misconduct. Figure 5 presents a breakdown of the status of retaliation complaints: not within the scope of the Office's mandate (20%), referred to other offices (7%), early monitoring and assessment (42%), tracking for pending action by other offices (18%) and final determinations (13%). Of the six final determinations, one case had been submitted for investigation; in the other five cases, no credible instances of retaliation were established. Complaints are handled according to specific procedures, using a secure filing and tracking system developed by the Office in collaboration with other United Nations offices and external experts.

Figure 5. Status of retaliation complaints (45)



46. Initially, the Office consulted extensively with the Office of Human Resources Management, the Office of Legal Affairs, the Office of the Ombudsman, the secretariat of the Joint Appeals Board and the Office of Internal Oversight Services in establishing its procedures for dealing with complaints of retaliation. The Office continues to coordinate its response to individual cases of complaints, without compromising the confidentiality of sensitive information. Coordination is crucial to

preventing duplication of responses by the above-mentioned offices in instances of multiple reporting of the same complaint. Considerable advisory support was provided by the Government Accountability Project, an international non-governmental organization devoted to whistle-blower protection.

V. Observations

47. At this early stage of the operations of the Ethics Office, it is noteworthy that 70 per cent of staff required to file financial disclosures and 35 per cent of all staff requests for services were from offices away from New York.

48. In the provision of ethics advice, as mentioned above, it is the intention of the Ethics Office to clarify procedures governing the receiving and reporting of gifts by staff in their official capacity, in consultation with other offices. Such consultations should harmonize the interpretation of relevant rules and standardize procedures for receiving and reporting gifts in all duty stations.

49. In the administration of the financial disclosure programme, more resources than anticipated have been required, in terms of substantive and administrative inputs on the part of the Office staff. The extension of financial disclosure obligations to a wider range of staff has required ongoing intensive liaison with the executive offices of the Secretariat, delivery of information sessions on the programme and responses to hundreds of individual enquiries from staff members concerned, prior to the deadline. Subsequent to the deadline, the registration of incoming outstanding disclosure forms and follow-up on them have continued to place demands on the Office. Those demands should be taken into account when making future decisions regarding staffing and resource allocation.

50. As noted above, a review of the functions of officials other than Secretariat officials and experts on mission and the risks of financial and political interests in their work should be carried out by the future staff of the Ethics Office.

51. In protecting staff against retaliation for reporting misconduct, the role of the Ethics Office should be better clarified for staff. The Office does not duplicate the investigative role of heads of department or other offices, such as the Office of Internal Oversight Services or the Office of Human Resources Management, but only makes an initial judgement on whether a staff member's complaint merits further investigation. Even so, given the often complex nature of the complaints and the due process requirements of preliminary fact-finding, additional resources will be required to implement that function effectively.

52. The procedures for implementing the policies mandated under the Office have been developed and publicized through the development of promotional material and the page for the Office on iSeek. To improve those procedures and ensure uniformity in their application, a preliminary draft of an operating manual has been developed for continuous reference.

53. As stated above, the Secretary-General will present a comprehensive review of the Ethics Office at the sixty-second session of the General Assembly, as recommended by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions in its report (A/60/418). The Secretary-General will also present his views on the possible establishment of a group of internationally representative experts to provide periodic, independent assessment of the Ethics Office.

VI. Conclusion

54. The Ethics Office must continue to be an active player and partner in the ongoing process of United Nations management reform, given the clear need to reinforce ethical values, standards and accountability in that process. To make an effective contribution, the Office must reach out to both staff and management and engage in a constructive dialogue.

55. Independence and impartiality are of vital importance in the functioning of the Ethics Office, and must be actively preserved and strengthened as the final structure of the Office is put in place and its work evolves.



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**Promotion and protection of the rights of children: Promotion
and protection of the rights of children**

Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

Summary

Important advances on the children and armed conflict agenda have created a strong impetus for the application of international standards and norms to deliver tangible protection for children in situations of armed conflict. Concrete measures are being undertaken to ensure accountability of and compliance by those parties who commit grave child rights violations. It is imperative that the momentum that now exists is maintained and that the gains that have been made for children are consolidated and further strengthened.

The report presents an overview of the plight of children in situations of armed conflict and outlines some of the progress on the agenda for their protection. The report lays out the strategic plan of the Special Representative for advancing the children and armed conflict agenda, the key priorities, objectives and strategies.

The report concludes that broader and stronger consensus and action is required for the enforcement of international protection standards; that there needs to be equal emphasis on children in all situations of concern and on all grave violations committed against them; that deeper collaboration, collective action and pressure is required by all the key stakeholders; and that donors should provide adequate support to ensure the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of intervention programmes for war-affected children.

* A/61/150.



I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 51/77 of 12 December 1996, by which the Assembly established the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and requested the submission of an annual report on the situation of children affected by armed conflict. The Assembly has since extended the mandate of the Special Representative three times, most recently by resolution 60/231 of 23 December 2005. This is the ninth report on children and armed conflict submitted to the Assembly.

2. The year 2006 marks an important turning point in the development of the agenda for war-affected children, with significant developments that have again demonstrated the remarkable resolve and commitment of the international community to protect children impacted by armed conflict. An extraordinary impetus now exists for the application on the ground of international standards and norms for the protection of children. It is imperative that this momentum is maintained in order to consolidate the gains that have been registered and to further advance the children and armed conflict agenda.

3. Of particular note since the Special Representative's previous report to the General Assembly (A/60/335 and Corr.1) is the fact that Member States identified war-affected children as an explicit priority in the 2005 World Summit Outcome (General Assembly resolution 60/1), calling upon all States concerned to take concrete measures to ensure accountability of and compliance by those parties who commit grave violations against children, and welcoming the significant advances made by the Security Council to engender compliance with protection standards and norms, including through the adoption on 26 July 2005 of its far-reaching resolution 1612 (2005).

4. The General Assembly, at its sixtieth session, also voted overwhelmingly for the extension of the mandate of the Office of the Special Representative for a further period of three years, clearing the way for the appointment of a new Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict by the Secretary-General. To underline this commitment to children, the General Assembly also, for the first time, included the Office of the Special Representative in the regular budget of the United Nations for the current biennium.

5. Increasingly, actions around monitoring, reporting and compliance on grave violations against children have begun to coalesce into a concrete, systematic, and coordinated initiative that brings together all major stakeholders, including Member States, some regional organizations, key United Nations departments, offices, funds and programmes, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local civil society. It is also evident that the coordination and mainstreaming of children and armed conflict concerns into priorities, policies and programmes within the United Nations system and beyond has begun to take root in more fundamental ways.

6. The year 2006 marks the 10-year anniversary of the seminal report of Graça Machel, entitled "The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children" (A/51/306 and Add.1), which led to the establishment of the initial mandate for war-affected children and the initiation of a strategic and purposive agenda on their behalf. While much has been accomplished, it is time, together with United Nations system partners and other key players, to consider a multi-stakeholder initiative to carry out

an assessment of progress, lessons learned, good practices and challenges remaining.

7. Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy assumed the position of Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in April 2006. The present report accordingly outlines the key priorities of the Office of the Special Representative in the new phase of the mandate, including the strategies that will be employed to ensure the institution of an "era of application" of international child protection standards and norms. The report also highlights some significant areas of progress in the efforts of the international community to deliver tangible protection for children affected by armed conflict.

II. Overview of the situation of children affected by armed conflict

8. In 2000, the United Nations in Sierra Leone demobilized a boy, "Abou" who had been abducted by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) from his school in Kenema. He was only 11 years old at the time of his abduction. Four years later, by the age of 15, Abou had become a killer — a known and feared commander of the RUF rebels — one of the youngest. Abou, together with many other child soldiers, received amnesty for atrocities committed during the conflict in Sierra Leone. And although his community accepted Abou back, it was clear that many in the community were still afraid of and angry with the boy and he was quite isolated. Six months after being reunited with his family Abou disappeared. In 2003, Abou was among a number of children disarmed and demobilized in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire. He told a story of leaving his community in Sierra Leone because he was "haunted by bad spirits", and of being re-recruited to fight for the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) rebels in Liberia. He later went as a mercenary to Côte d'Ivoire together with other LURD fighters. In an interview with United Nations staff, Abou explained, "I left because what I really know how to do is fight and be a soldier, but there is peace in Sierra Leone".

9. Abou's story illustrates a terrible tragedy: of the trauma of children and the communities that they have been forced to brutalize; of the tremendous challenges to successful healing and reintegration of children into communities in the aftermath of conflict; of the recycling of children into conflicts that shift rapidly across borders; and, of children and young people who take up lives as mercenary fighters because war has become one of the only viable economic options in many of the situations around the globe that have been ravaged by long periods of conflict. These are our children, on whom all hopes for the future are pinned.

10. In stark opposition to the commitments of the international community and the significant progress that has been made on the children and armed conflict agenda, grave violations against children in situations of concern continue to be perpetrated on an alarming scale. Thousands of children are being directly affected, both as victims of violence and as perpetrators of terrible atrocities against their own communities. The resulting mental and physical trauma of these children represents a grave threat to durable peace and sustainable development, as cultures and cycles of violence are perpetuated.

11. Today, in over 30 situations of concern around the globe, children are being brutalized and callously used to advance the agendas of adults. It has been estimated that over 2 million children have been killed in situations of armed conflict, another 6 million have been rendered permanently disabled, and, more than 250,000 children continue to be exploited as child soldiers. Increasingly, children and women are the casualties of war, with the fatalities of civilians disproportionately higher than ever before in the history of warfare. Thousands of girls are being subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence and exploitation, and boys and girls are being abducted from their homes and communities on an unprecedented scale. The very places that should be the safe havens for children — their schools and hospitals — are increasingly becoming the prime targets of attack by armed parties. In many situations parties to conflict systematically deny humanitarian agencies access to territories under their control, with devastating consequences for civilian populations and especially children. In addition, the scourge of landmines claims the lives and well-being of an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 children each year. There are indications also that the trafficking of children in and from conflict zones is becoming a growing transnational trend, linked to elaborate international criminal networks. Such networks often fuel conflicts by facilitating the conversion of natural resources such as diamonds, coltan and timber into the very means and tools of war that have led to the increase in victimization and participation of children in conflict.

12. Fighting groups have developed brutal and sophisticated techniques to separate and isolate children from their communities. Children are often terrorized into obedience, consistently made to fear for their lives and well-being. They quickly recognize that absolute obedience is the only means to ensure survival. Sometimes they are compelled to participate in the killing of other children or family members, because it is understood by these groups that there is "no way back home" for children after they have committed such crimes. In an interview with United Nations staff in Liberia, a boy of 13 years admitted that he felt that he could not return to his family because he knew that his father would be angry with him for bringing men to the village who had raped and killed his mother in front of the whole family. He said that he had brought the men to the village because the commander had told him that he was going to be taken back to his family — "after that the rebels became my family and I did everything to please my father [the commander]". The considerable challenges in healing and reintegrating children into their communities in the aftermath of conflict is sometimes further compounded by severe addiction and dependency of children to hard drugs such as cocaine. In Sierra Leone, for instance, a volatile mixture of cocaine and gunpowder was often given to children to make them fearless in battle. And, because children are now also the instruments of brutality, sometimes committing the very worst atrocities, reintegration is often a complex process of community healing and atonement, and negotiation with families to accept their children back. All these dimensions of the experience of child combatants carry significant implications and challenges in terms of design and resources needs for psychosocial and other reintegration programming.

13. It is clear also that there are categories of children who are especially vulnerable in situations of armed conflict, such as girls, refugee and internally displaced children, and child-headed households. These children require special advocacy, attention and protection. The girl child is often the victim of sexual violence and exploitation, and, increasingly, girl children are being recruited into

fighting forces. In intervention initiatives for war-affected children, such as community-based reintegration programmes for children associated with fighting forces, it is girls that are most often being bypassed, even though they are in greatest need of care and services. We miss girls in our interventions because many of them are unwilling to come forward in the first place, to be identified as "bush wives" or to have their children labelled as "rebel babies". Communities often stigmatize and ostracize girls because of their association with rebel groups and the "taint" of having been raped. Often, rebel groups categorically refuse to give up the girls at all even after commitments have been made to release children, because even where associations between perpetrators and victims have begun with abduction, rape and violence, over several years "family units" have developed which include babies born of rape. In terms of programme response, all of these factors represent critical challenges for the international community, and more often than not, resources available fall short of the scope and complexity of the challenges. A deeper understanding is required of the acute vulnerability of girls in situations of armed conflict, which should inform more gender-sensitive strategies and protection and programme responses.

14. Evidence indicates that refugee and internally displaced persons' camps are often prime recruiting grounds for child soldiers because of the convenient concentrations of children in these zones. These children also face severe protection risks during flight as well as outside camp boundaries that can include killing or maiming, sexual violence, abduction and trafficking. In Darfur, Sudan, for instance, the international community has witnessed alarming levels of sexual violence, often as a deliberate strategy of humiliation and ethnic cleansing. Such attacks have been directed especially against the large populations of internally displaced girls and women. In many places, the collection of water and firewood outside the boundaries of camps has become a life-and-death gamble for girls.

15. In his fifth report to the Security Council on children and armed conflict (A/59/695-S/2005/72), the Secretary-General documented grave violations against children in 11 situations of concern, from Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, the Sudan and Uganda, to Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Colombia. Furthermore, the report explicitly cited 54 parties, both State and non-State actors, for the commission of grave violations against children. The Secretary-General indicated that the condition of children living in situations of armed conflict had improved considerably in several locations since his 2004 review, including in Afghanistan, Angola, the Balkans, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Kosovo (Serbia), and Timor-Leste. Eight parties were dropped from the Secretary-General's list of violators owing to changes in their conduct, two parties were added as the result of improved monitoring and reporting, and three parties were removed owing to a lack of verifiable information. At the same time, the plight of children in the Middle East, especially the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Lebanon, has become even graver in the recent escalation of hostilities, and the situation for children has also continued to deteriorate in crisis areas and emerging situations of concern such as Darfur and eastern Chad. In other situations such as Haiti, where the dynamics of conflict are very different, children also face similar grave violations including systematic recruitment into armed groups, death and maiming either through direct involvement in violence or in the crossfire, abduction and kidnapping and sexual violence.

16. This schematic overview is indicative of a prevailing culture and rising trends of abuse of children in the context of armed conflict. It is important to recognize, however, that there is an acute lack of definitive and reliable information and data on many aspects of the problem of children and armed conflict, and the statistics that we do have are more often than not best-guess estimates and extrapolations. The lack of reliable data represents a critical gap in knowledge that severely hampers our collective protection and programme responses.

III. Overview of progress

17. Collaborative efforts over the last eight years between the Office of the Special Representative, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other key United Nations entities, as well as Member States, regional organizations, NGOs and other civil society groups, have resulted in significant advances, actions and tangible results for children. These advances include increased global awareness of some of the issues concerning children affected by armed conflict; development and strengthening of international norms and standards for the protection of children; consistent focus and prioritization of this issue by the General Assembly; placing children and armed conflict on the international peace and security agenda through systematic engagement of the Security Council; and deeper mainstreaming of children and armed conflict in the United Nations system. The broadening of the global circle of stakeholders and action on children and armed conflict through strategic and concerted advocacy has been critical in this process.

18. Beyond the United Nations, regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States and the European Union have begun to implement the commitments that they have made to children in the context of their own peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding initiatives. Notably in recent months, the European Union adopted a strategy for the practical implementation of the European Union Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict. Also on the initiative of the European Union, a joint United Nations-European Union two-week pilot specialization course on "Child Protection, Monitoring and Rehabilitation" is being convened in 2006 as a practical measure to bring together child protection practitioners and to share and deepen expertise in support of important initiatives around monitoring and reporting on grave child rights violations. Also significant has been a more systematic inclusion of children's concerns in peace agreements, with the African Union Mediation for Darfur, for instance, explicitly incorporating children's provisions in the Darfur Peace Agreement of May 2006.

19. Important precedents have also been set in the fight to end impunity through the application of international child protection standards. For example, in October 2005 the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for five senior members of the insurgent Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), including its rebel leader, Joseph Kony, who is charged with 33 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murder, rape, enslavement, sexual enslavement, and forcible enlistment and utilization in hostilities of children under 15 years. In March 2006, the International Criminal Court also announced the indictment of Thomas Lubanga Dyilo, founder and leader of the Union of Congolese Patriots in the Ituri region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for commission of war crimes, conscription and enlistment of children under the age of 15 and the use of children for active participation in hostilities. And, national processes in the Democratic Republic of

the Congo recently saw the successful prosecution, conviction and sentencing of Major Jean-Pierre Biyoyo of the Mudundo Forty armed group by the National Military Tribunal in South Kivu, for the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. Also for the first time, a former head of State Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, was transferred into the custody of the Special Court for Sierra Leone under indictment on 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including "conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 years into armed forces or groups, or using them to participate actively in hostilities".

20. The annual report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on children and armed conflict, and particularly the lists annexed to his report which explicitly identify parties who commit grave violations, working in tandem with the resolutions of the Security Council on children and armed conflict, represent tools designed to put increasing pressure on parties to conflict to comply with international child protection standards. These tools have been significantly strengthened and refined and it is evident that the pressure on parties is beginning to yield direct and tangible results for children. Since the adoption of the landmark Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), a number of parties have established dialogue with the United Nations within the framework of the resolution towards the preparation and implementation of time-bound action plans to prevent and end the violations for which they are cited.

21. In that regard, in November 2005 the rebel group Forces nouvelles in Côte d'Ivoire, under concerted pressure from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Côte d'Ivoire and from UNICEF, submitted to the Special Representative an action plan to prevent recruitment and to release children associated with their forces. This concrete commitment is the culmination of dialogue established by UNICEF with the Forces nouvelles since 2003. The United Nations is now working with Forces nouvelles to identify the children and reintegrate them into their communities. Pro-Government militia groups in Côte d'Ivoire have now also signalled their full cooperation towards the preparation of a similar action plan, the modalities of which are presently under discussion.

22. Also in June 2006, the Special Representative was invited by the Government of Uganda to undertake a visit to familiarize herself with the situation of children affected by the conflict in northern Uganda. While there, the Special Representative heard from survivors the horrific acts of violence perpetrated on the people of northern Uganda by LRA. She also heard from women and girls who are subject to widespread sexual violence in the camps for internally displaced persons. Addressing the presence of children among Government forces, the Special Representative confirmed that although there were indeed children slipping through established procedures into the Ugandan People's Defence Forces and the Government's Local Defence Units, there was no explicit policy of recruitment of children on the part of the Government of Uganda. To address the issue, the Government of Uganda has committed to strengthening implementation of the existing legal and policy frameworks on the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, agreeing to an action plan to: (i) sensitize various stakeholders on the national laws, international conventions and protocols against recruitment and use of children in armed forces; (ii) to monitor implementation of the various national laws, international conventions and protocols against the recruitment and use of children in armed forces; and (iii) to remove children if and when found in the armed forces. The Government of Uganda has reiterated its commitment to

appropriate disciplinary action against those military officers who knowingly recruit and use children, and has agreed to strengthen existing independent monitoring procedures for joint access to military installations by designated institutions. The Government of Uganda will also review existing laws to cover the crime of aiding and abetting of recruitment of children in armed forces by civilian officials.

23. These developments set an important precedent for the delivery of tangible protection for children in situations of armed conflict. It is now vitally important to maintain pressure and make sure that commitments that have been made are fully implemented. It is also essential to underline the critical need for additional and timely support for national reintegration efforts. Adequate support from donor agencies for child disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes encompassing all children associated with armed groups is necessary to ensure reintegration strategies that are sustainable over time and mitigate re-recruitment.

24. It is noteworthy that UNICEF is presently leading an important initiative to enhance and expand the endorsement of the Cape Town Principles and Best Practice on the Prevention of Recruitment of Children into Armed Forces and on the Demobilization and Social Reintegration of Child Soldiers in Africa. These principles have contributed to critical policy formulation in this area.

25. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (General Assembly resolution 54/263, annex I) presently has 121 signatories and 107 parties. The Special Representative will continue to advocate with Member States for ratification or accession to this important international instrument.

IV. Strategic plan of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

26. Since assuming office in April 2006, the Special Representative has held consultations with key constituents on priorities of her Office over the next two years. In line with her mandate, she has presented the draft strategic plan for her Office to various partners and received valuable input. The key objectives of the strategic plan are: (i) supporting global initiatives to end grave violations; (ii) promoting rights-based protection for children affected by armed conflict; (iii) making children and armed conflict concerns an integral aspect of peacekeeping and peacebuilding; and (iv) raising awareness with regard to all issues relating to children and armed conflict.

27. The strategic plan is underpinned by the Mission Statement of the Office of the Special Representative:

“To promote and protect the rights of all children affected by armed conflict”.

- The Special Representative serves as a moral voice and independent advocate for the protection and well-being of boys and girls affected by armed conflict.
- The Special Representative and her Office advocate, build awareness and give prominence to the rights and protection of children and armed conflict. The Special Representative works with partners to propose ideas and approaches to enhance the protection of children and armed conflict and to promote a more concerted protection response.

- The Special Representative is a facilitator, undertaking humanitarian and diplomatic initiatives to facilitate the work of operational actors on the ground with regard to children and armed conflict.

A. Objectives

1. Supporting global initiatives to end grave violations against children affected by armed conflict

28. As an independent voice and advocate for children affected by armed conflict, the Special Representative will highlight, promote and support global initiatives by the numerous actors and entities that are focused on preventing and ending grave violations against children and bringing perpetrators of abuses to justice. The Special Representative will advocate also for rigorous post-conflict rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives and programmes for children.

29. It must be noted that one of the great advances on the children and armed conflict agenda in recent times is the intervention of the United Nations Security Council and the passing of resolution 1612 (2005) of 26 July 2005. In the resolution the Council requests a comprehensive monitoring and reporting process which may eventually lead to targeted measures against offending parties. The Council also calls for the creation of a working group of the Council to deal specifically with children and armed conflict. The primary goal of the Office of the Special Representative will be to take the lead, in close consultation with UNICEF, on issues relating to the above-mentioned Security Council process, to further deepen the engagement of the Security Council on the issue of children and armed conflict, and to ensure that the process within the Council ultimately leads to enhanced protection for children on the ground.

30. The Office of the Special Representative will also follow closely other critical initiatives, including the proceedings of the International Criminal Court in cases relating to grave violations against children, in particular child recruitment. Where appropriate, the Office of the Special Representative will consult with partners to develop legal interpretations on crimes against humanity involving children, in support of the work of the International Criminal Court.

2. Promoting rights-based protection for children affected by armed conflict

31. In addition to taking measures for monitoring and reporting violations and ending impunity, the Office of the Special Representative will promote, in close consultation with OHCHR and UNICEF, the adoption of a rights-based approach to protection issues involving children and armed conflict.

3. Making children and armed conflict concerns an integral aspect of peacekeeping and peacebuilding

32. The emphasis of the United Nations on enhancing its capacity and infrastructure for effective peacekeeping and peacebuilding represents a critical system-wide priority. The Office of the Special Representative will work closely with Member States, relevant United Nations partners and the new Peacebuilding Commission to ensure that children's protection, demobilization and reintegration needs are addressed in the initial planning and implementation of peacekeeping and

peacebuilding operations. Emphasis will also be given to the important role of child protection advisers and other child protection mechanisms in peacekeeping operations. The Special Representative will also advocate for the protection and participation of children in transitional justice mechanism and processes in the aftermath of conflict.

4. Raising awareness with regard to all other issues relating to war-affected children before, during and after conflict

33. The monitoring, reporting and compliance process that has now been established emphasizes the need to look beyond child soldiering and to recognize five other categories of grave violations against children. The Special Representative will continue to advocate against such violations wherever they occur. It is necessary to recognize, however, that the range of protection issues related to children and armed conflict goes beyond even the six categories of violations being considered in the framework of the Security Council, and includes also such issues as psychosocial recovery, the challenges of reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups, the problems related to children under siege from HIV/AIDS, the disruption of education, the lack of access to health care and trafficking of children. Therefore, the Special Representative will aim to raise awareness and support further studies on emerging concerns for children, especially such issues as may be raised by United Nations and NGO partners, in support of a more concerted response.

B. Strategies

34. In pursuit of the objectives outlined above, the Office of the Special Representative will engage, in close consultation with United Nations partners, Member States, NGOs and civil society groups, the following essential strategies:

- (a) Monitoring and reporting, especially with regard to grave violations;
- (b) Advocacy, with regard to all aspects of the children and armed conflict agenda;
- (c) Coordination and mainstreaming, with regard to all aspects of the agenda;
- (d) Research and study, focusing on lessons learned, best practices and emerging areas of concern.

1. Monitoring and reporting

35. Monitoring and reporting on children affected by armed conflict addresses itself to six grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict:

- (a) Killing or maiming of children;
- (b) Recruitment or use of children as soldiers;
- (c) Rape and other grave sexual abuse of children;
- (d) Abduction of children;
- (e) Attacks against schools or hospitals;
- (f) Denial of humanitarian access for children.

36. Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), by which the Council requests the implementation of a mechanism specified by the Secretary-General in his fifth report on children and armed conflict (A/59/695-S/2005/72) to monitor and report on these six grave violations, has broken new ground in terms of the institution of practical measures towards the ending of impunity of violating parties. As such, the resolution represents a critical element of the collective efforts of the international community to secure the "era of application" of international protection standards for children.

37. Following the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), the Office of the Special Representative has been tasked with the coordination and drafting of reports from the Secretary-General to a Working Group of the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict, consisting of all its members. It is intended that reports to the Working Group should serve as "triggers for action" by the Council and other relevant policy level actors, resulting in pressure upon parties to conflict to halt violations against children.

38. The Security Council requested the implementation of the mechanism in a phased approach, beginning with five situations of concern for children that are also on the country-specific agenda for the Security Council, namely: Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, and the Sudan (these situations are listed in annex I to the report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on children and armed conflict (*ibid.*)). In addition, the first phase has also seen the implementation of the mechanism in two other situations of concern — Nepal and Sri Lanka — which are drawn from annex II to the Secretary-General's report, which lists situations of concern that are not on the country-specific agenda of the Security Council.

39. It is important to stress that the practice of monitoring and reporting on grave child rights violations is not a new initiative. Over the past several years in particular, the United Nations system and NGO partners have gained valuable experience in monitoring and reporting, which forms the basis of the current efforts to strengthen this critical practice.

40. The Secretary-General has submitted to the Working Group the first country-specific report on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2006/389). In the forthcoming meeting of the Working Group, scheduled for September 2006, it will issue recommendations to the Security Council on the basis of the report of the Secretary-General, and it will also consider the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Sudan (S/2006/662). For the remainder of the year, it is anticipated that the Working Group will consider reports and make recommendations to the Council on children and armed conflict in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Nepal and Sri Lanka. In addition to these country-specific reports of the Secretary-General, the United Nations Secretariat also submits for consideration of the Working Group at its bimonthly meetings a horizontal reporting note that highlights relevant development in all situations of concern for children. The horizontal reporting note represents a vital tool to flag critical emerging situations and update developments in other situations of concern.

41. Finally, it must be stressed that an effective monitoring, reporting and compliance regime depends largely on the collaboration of a number of critical stakeholders, particularly Member States, United Nations system partners, NGOs and local civil society, in situations of concern. The success of this protection

initiative will depend on how effectively collective will, resources and expertise are mobilized and deployed at the multiple levels of the mechanism — country level, United Nations Headquarters level, and the level of policymaking bodies that may undertake specific actions for the protection of children, on the basis of timely and reliable information emanating from the monitoring mechanism. The Special Representative is committed to ensuring that the space and opportunity exist for the full participation of all partners and stakeholders.

2. Advocacy

42. Targeted, concerted and strategic advocacy on all aspects of the children and armed conflict agenda will underpin the work of the Office of the Special Representative. Activities will be geared towards: (i) creating awareness and global consensus on the need to protect all children affected by armed conflict both during and after conflict; (ii) creating a broad coalition of support for the further development and application of international human rights standards as they relate to war-affected children; and (iii) advancing ideas and mobilizing support for policies within the United Nations system, regional organizations and donor aid practices to ensure that the protection of children affected by armed conflict is addressed in their peacebuilding, human rights, humanitarian, transitional and development aid strategies.

43. The Special Representative will advocate with other important “destinations for action”, such as the new Human Rights Council, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the General Assembly, the Peacebuilding Commission, regional organizations, national Governments and other entities, that have different capacities and important roles to play within the purview of their own mandates, jurisdictions and responsibilities.

44. Field visits by the Special Representative and her Office are a crucial aspect of her mandate and necessary for promoting increased cooperation. Such visits enable the Special Representative to bear witness first-hand to the situation of children, to enhance dialogue with Member States, to support more effectively the work of operational partners, to elicit commitments from parties to conflict and to unblock difficult political situations, as required.

45. In addition to the mission that the Special Representative has already undertaken to Uganda, she also hopes to conduct field visits in the near future to other situations of concern, including the Middle East, Thailand, Nepal, the Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Advanced planning is also under way for a visit to Sri Lanka by a high-level special adviser of the Special Representative, with technical support of her Office’s programme staff.

3. Coordination and mainstreaming

46. The mainstreaming of the concerns of children affected by armed conflict into the policies and programmes of United Nations system entities and into United Nations institutional processes is a central priority, and critical to ensuring the protection and well-being of war-affected children. Also vitally important is the mainstreaming of this issue beyond the United Nations, into the priorities and activities of regional organizations and other multilateral groupings, and into key national institutions and processes at country level.

47. The Special Representative convenes the Task Force on Children and Armed Conflict, which consists of all relevant United Nations offices, departments, funds and programmes. This forum serves as a locus of consultation and policy formulation on children and armed conflict, and as such represents an important tool for mainstreaming and coordination on children and armed conflict. A closer analysis of mainstreaming efforts will be considered in 2007, bearing in mind information already presented in the Special Representative's 2004 report to the General Assembly (A/59/426). In this regard, the Special Representative looks forward to the completion by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of a long-anticipated review on the deployment of child protection advisers, with a view to making more effective and further institutionalizing this important initiative of United Nations peacekeeping.

4. Research and study

48. As already indicated, the Special Representative is particularly concerned that in certain areas there is a lack of a knowledge base to take effective action with regard to children affected by armed conflict. For this reason the Office of the Special Representative hopes, in collaboration with its partners, and subject to funding, to stimulate research and study in a number of areas such as: 10-year review of progress and challenges since the Graça Machel report; legal research into the International Criminal Court provisions with regard to war crimes and crimes against humanity in relation to children and armed conflict; research on the girl child in armed conflict; needs and concerns of former boy soldiers, their attitudes to violence, their understanding of masculinity and their responsiveness to alternative livelihoods; lessons learned and best practices in particular successful strategies for the reintegration of children into society; children in transitional justice processes; local norms, values and practices and capacities of local civil society as a front line of protection for children.

V. Working with partners

49. Systematic engagement with Member States will continue to be an essential aspect of the work of the Office of the Special Representative, in the context of a number of different frameworks and forums, including the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Human Rights Council, with regional organizations and groupings, and in bilateral contacts with the Member States most actively engaged or affected. The Special Representative will also continue to rely on those Member States that have, for several years, formed the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict. The Friends Group has served an important advocacy role at critical moments in the development of the agenda, and will continue to be essential in this regard as we enter the "era of application" of standards for the protection of children.

50. The Special Representative is also committed to facilitating closer relations on this issue between Member States and NGOs. Early in the agenda, the Special Representative facilitated direct contact between child protection NGOs and the Security Council through the "Arria formula" on children and armed conflict, which has now become a regular practice of direct exchange prior to the annual open debate of the Security Council devoted to children and armed conflict. Deepening such engagement between Member States and NGOs is also essential. The Special

Representative has also established a structure for consultation with NGOs at United Nations Headquarters level on monitoring and reporting as well as all other aspects of the agenda.

51. The Special Representative will also advocate for greater attention and resources to local NGOs and civil society such as women's and youth groups and faith-based communities, who represent the very front line of protection for children. In conflict situations these are frequently the formal and informal protection networks and arrangements that exist when international NGOs and United Nations agencies have limited or no access.

52. The Special Representative will continue to work through the Task Force on Children and Armed Conflict to foster discussion, collaboration and cooperation to advance the agenda. The Task Force consists of UNICEF, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs, the Office of Legal Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the Department for Disarmament Affairs, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

53. With the closest United Nations partners on the agenda, such as UNICEF, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, OHCHR, UNHCR, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UNDP, more effective collaboration depends on identifying complementarity and ensuring clarity on division of labour on an issue that cuts across the mandates and responsibilities of multiple actors in the United Nations system. The mandate and role of the Special Representative is to provide leadership, visibility and greater global awareness of the rights of children affected by armed conflict and to mobilize political support and facilitate collaborative efforts on the issue across the United Nations system and beyond. The Office of the Special Representative does not have a field presence but promotes and supports the efforts of operational partners.

VI. Conclusion

54. Significant advances and momentum on the children and armed conflict agenda have now put the international community in a position to begin to redress the conspicuous imbalance between strong protection standards and the grim reality for children on the ground. We now have, as never before, the practical means and tools to end impunity of those who systematically commit the most grave violations against children, and to usher in an "era of application" of international child protection standards. What is now required most of all is the political will and spirit of common purpose and collaboration to ensure that we live up to the promises that we have made to our children. It requires a measure of introspection of all stakeholders, to determine and live up to their own particular role and responsibility to protect our children. Ultimately, it is the collective pressure and action by the diverse range of actors that compose the international community that will prevent and alleviate the suffering of children.

VII. Recommendations

55. The General Assembly has played a critical enabling role on the agenda of children and armed conflict, and at this critical juncture I urge Member States to mobilize broader and stronger consensus and action for the enforcement of international standards for the protection for all children affected by armed conflict.

56. It is also critical that the international community focuses equal care and attention to all children affected by armed conflict, including through the application in all relevant situations of concern of the Secretary-General's mechanism for violations monitoring, reporting and compliance, and that we also prioritize all categories of grave violations beyond the recruitment and use of child soldiers, including the killing or maiming of children, rape or other grave sexual violence, abduction, attacks against schools or hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access for children.

57. I urge all stakeholders, especially Member States, United Nations entities and NGOs, to recognize the critical need and importance of genuine and open collaboration, and to ensure a spirit of common purpose and coordinated, collective action on behalf of children affected by armed conflict.

58. I call upon donors to ensure adequate funding for programmes for the rehabilitation and reintegration of all children that have been associated with armed forces, to ensure the long-term sustainability and success of such interventions.